

Melvin Joseph Gaudin, Jr.
June 11, 1923 — January 3, 2016
Victor, Montana

Memorial by Steve F. Russell

Mel Gaudin was one of the finest people I ever met and he had a big influence on my life. I was a student at the Stevensville, Montana high schools when Mel was hired to be the band teacher. I was a big fan of New Orleans traditional jazz and Mel was a major influence on my life because he knew the music. While I was at Stevensville, he chose me to play with trumpet with saxophonist, Bill Page from the Lawrence Welk Orchestra. We performed the dixieland favorite, "South." ***put in other band members*** The concert was recorded and sold as LP vinyl records. I still have mine.

Mel had a dance band that played around the Bitterroot Valley and, a few time, I went to the dances and begged him to let me play a couple of tunes with the band. He was always gracious in letting me play but I could feel that he was stepping out of his comfort zone. Those were delightful times for me and I let him know.

I went to visit Mel on July 11, 2014 at his home in Victor, Montana. He had a great time swapping stories and he was delighted that I had kept up with NOLA jazz trumpet and had played on Bourbon Street and at Preservation Hall. It was his influence that motivated me to do so. Both of us knew it would probably be the last time we saw each other and we were right.

Mel give me a musical album of his Bitterroot Valley Symphonic Band that played at the 1974 World's Fair. I have been to that fair but missed the band performance. It was nice to learn about it. I gave Mel a CD of my trumpet playing in jazz and big bands but we never talked again about it.

There are probably many hundreds, if not thousands, of music students that would feel the way I do about his great teaching style and how much they appreciated him. I am also trying to say it for them.

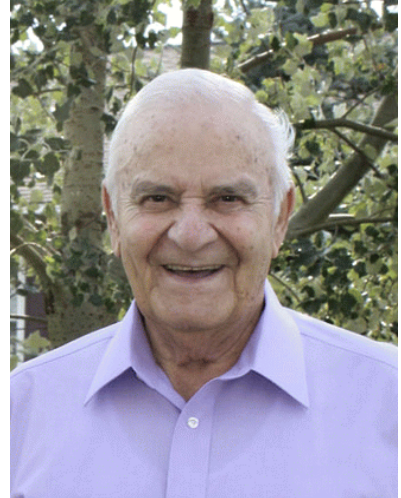
Thank you Mel,

Your former music student,

Steve F. Russell, Trumpet
Ames, Iowa
June 12, 2017

Melvin Joseph Gaudin, Jr.
June 11, 1923 ~ January 3, 2016 (age 92)

Melvin J. Gaudin, known best to his friends and family as "Mel" or, often times affectionately nick named "Cajun," a loving husband, father, papa, friend, musician, realtor, and lover of life passed away on Sunday, January 3, 2015 in Hamilton, Montana, due to natural causes at the age of 92 after living a long healthy life.



Mel was born to Melvin and Leoncia Gaudin, on June 11, 1923, in Convent, Louisiana, in the Gaudin family home on the banks of the Mississippi river, where he grew up in a large, loving family with 4 brothers and 2 sisters. Mel graduated from Romeville High School in Romeville, Louisiana, and immediately began his secondary education at Louisiana State University where he majored in Music.

Mel attended LSU for two years until he joined the U.S. Army in 1943. Mel heroically served his country during World War II as a medic stationed at the 111th General Hospital in England where he cared for injured American soldiers returning from battle. Upon conclusion of the war, Mel was stationed at Fort Lewis, Washington and, it was during this time where Mel met the love of his life, Earlene Roberts of Victor, Montana, while she was working in Olympia, Washington as a telegrapher for Western Union. As the story goes, Mel had gone into the Western Union to send a telegram to his mother in Louisiana when his eyes met Earlene's, and it was love at first sight. Mel and Earlene were happily married on August 30th, 1946 at St. Mary's Mission, in Stevensville, Montana, by Fr. Leonard Jensen. At the time of Mel's passing, he and Earlene had cherished each other's company as husband and wife for 69 years.

Early in their married life, Mel and Earlene ventured south to Louisiana in their 1917 Model T Ford, a trip that took 11 days traveling at breakneck speeds of 22 mph. The newlyweds resided in New Orleans for a short time, and while many exciting stories survived the trip, Mel and Earlene's love of Montana and music beckoned them home to Big Sky Country where Mel enrolled at the University of Montana. Mel completed his bachelor's degree in Music in 1950 and, upon graduation; he accepted the position of Music Teacher at Bridger School in Bridger, Montana. They resided in Bridger for six years before moving back to the Bitterroot Valley where Mel earned his Master's Degree in Music Education at the University of Montana all the while teaching part time at Stevensville High School.

On weekends, they performed with the Roberts - Gaudin Family Orchestra playing dance jobs throughout the Bitterroot Valley from the 1940's through the 1960's. Local Bitterrooters danced to the tapping of Earl's drums, Alice on the piano, Earlene's saxophone, and the blues and soul of Mel's trumpet.

Mel's unforgettable 20 year career in music took him to Stevensville, Florence, Corvallis and

Victor. His deep passion for music enriched many students' lives from elementary to high school. His bands were built around the value of Esprit de Corp and strict discipline resulting in near perfection, earning him recognition for his commitment to American Ideals by the Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge. In conjunction with teaching, Mel thoroughly enjoyed leading his band at school plays, sporting events and marching events. The finale of his music career was directing the 105 piece Bitterroot Valley Symphonic Band at the 1974 World's Fair in Spokane, Washington.

Mel's love of people and his contagious spirit provided great joy in his second career as a Real Estate Broker, where he was highly successful and cherished the challenge of meeting people's real estate needs. Mel enjoyed working alongside his wife, Earlene, and father-in-law, Earl Roberts, at Roberts Realty in Victor, Montana, and took tremendous pride when his son and daughter, Mike and Cheryl, joined him in the real estate business. As a civic minded leader, Mel was a member of the Knights of Columbus and served many years on the Victor Volunteer Fire Department, Victor Sewer Board and Victor School Board.

Mel truly embraced Montana and loved all the wonderful things it had to offer. He enjoyed hunting and fishing in the Bitterroot Valley back country. In later years, he loved taking his family snowmobiling in the winter and boating in the summer. Mel's family from Louisiana visited often and he enjoyed showing them Montana's treasures.

Mel always enjoyed a good trip with Earlene, whether it was an afternoon drive or a little run to Jackpot, Nevada. Their travels took them to Europe, and a few years later on to Nova Scotia to trace the Gaudin lineage. Recently, in 2010, Mel, Earlene, Cheryl, and Chelsey traveled to Louisiana. He called it his Alpha and Omega trip, because he visited the home where he was born and raised. In addition to visiting his Louisiana family, he returned to the French Quarter, listened to Jazz at Preservation Hall, and paid homage to the Roosevelt Hotel where he worked as a valet.

Mel is survived by his wife, Earlene; son, Michael Gaudin (wife, Sherri); daughter, Cheryl Gaudin Smith (husband, Butch); and granddaughters Chelsey Smith Kukuk (husband, Erik); Chenelle Smith; Paris Gaudin Dickerson (husband, Drew); Cierra Smith; and Sedona Gaudin. Additionally, Mel was so very happy to welcome his first great granddaughter, Savannah Mae, born October 19th, 2015, to Chelsey and Erik. Mel is also survived by his brother, Edwin Gaudin; sister, Flora Rivette; and numerous nieces and nephews in Louisiana.

To celebrate a life well lived the Vigil will be Monday, January 11th, 2016, at 7 pm, at Daly-Leach Memorial Chapel in Hamilton, Montana. The Funeral Mass will be on January 12, 2016, at 11 am, at St. Francis Parish with Father Jim Connor and Father Jack Darragh concelebrating. Military honors and a luncheon will follow immediately presented by the U.S. Army and the Corvallis American Legion. Due to the weather private interment will be held later that afternoon at the Victor cemetery.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to Marcus Daly Hospice, 1200 Westwood Drive, Hamilton, Montana, 59840.



2014 Steve F. Russell (L) and Mel Gaudin, Trumpet Players, Victor, Montana